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Essaying for Values That Endure

By VELMA O. NAVE

All education has been defined as "a search for truth and beauty." In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when God creates man, He says, "I will put mine umpire, Conscience, in his breast." We might designate a teacher who directs the search for truth and beauty as an umpire who interprets the rules of character necessary to awaken a consciousness of "Conscience" in her students. Joseph Auslander, in his poem "The Gardener of Souls," defines the "Master teacher" as:

He who from despair and fear sets free
The restless soul of Youth
To range the harsh terrain of truth—
To climb, to fall, to cling, to grasp
Up the grim Everest of Hope
Until above himself he stands
A new strength . . .

It is of this strength of character, of conscience, and of mind—its necessity, its development, and its revelation, both in the thinking and written expression of my students, that I now take you essaying.

Miss Nave, who teaches at Frankfort Community High School in West Frankfort, believes that in teaching the writing of essays we can teach students more than just the mechanics of writing, important though those are. In this article she explains and illustrates the ways that she employs to help her students think seriously about some of the important contemporary—or eternal—problems.

Let us first consider the need for a search for summit values that endure. Normally, the teen-ager desires to "drink of Life's fullness, *take* all it can *give*," but he has not been educated to *give* all the present world *takes*. Instead, he feels he is asked to give too much of his physical, mental, and moral strength in the climb "Up the grim Everest of Hope," whether he is striving for an education, for a career, or for actual physical survival in battle.

Basically the confusion in the youth's world is due to a false sense of values, a false understanding of what constitutes a really great person, cause, institution, or nation. Among these false values, championed by the modern go-getter, are the desire for power, wealth, popularity, and physical or material gratification. This take-all-the-world-gives attitude proposes winning personal values by shame, deceit, selfishness, boldness, and force. Youth senses in many "self-made" men qualities of disillusion, rudeness, prejudice, hypocrisy, arrogance, dishonesty. As a result, youth himself adopts a philosophy either of defeatism and lack of initiative or of egotism and arrogance, which often results in mental revolt and may lead to juvenile delinquency, because he has not learned to understand and to appreciate the fundamental values of life, such as faith, courage, honor, service, love, God, and immortality.

Like all education, essaying for high values in life is first a matter of attitudes. A teacher's attitude of reverence toward God, love, duty, her subject, and her students, as opposed to sheer frivolity in classroom activities, is conducive to preparation for any mental search for values. Inaction, inattention, indolence toward the right on the part of teacher or pupil is serious. The student's mood must often be somewhat serious, meditative, reverent, receptive toward serious values, so that the teacher can lead him to formulate his own opinions. Lack of ideas, a prejudiced or false sense of values, and the lack of undisturbed time, due often to interruptions by extracurricular activities which disturb students emotionally, are the major difficulties in the teaching of essay writing. We should seize opportunities, when our students are receptive, to direct them in the "search" and in the expression of high ideals. During special holidays, such as Easter, Christmas, National Education Week, Brotherhood Week, and birthdays of great people, students' moods are especially conducive to a consideration of meaningful ideals. Following is an example of an essay by detail, comparison, and contrast. It grew out of class discussion of Sidney Lanier's poem, "The Ballad of Trees and the

Master" and from an answer to the question: What is the true meaning of Easter to you?

In the Easter parade with all its fashionable array, familiar faces have been transformed to an almost unrecognizable degree. The lovely ladies, with their flowing, flimsy veils, are bedecked with novel outfits. Eyes are fastened upon the different and unusual styles of hats, which range all the way from fruit and flower-garden effects to animals with feathers and frills.

The tiny tots are never overlooked in the gay Easter parade. They toddle among the crowd with their petite straw bonnets and grown-up appearances. Some resemble freshly-bloomed sunflowers and others, newly dyed Easter eggs of many hues.

Men are generally forgotten at this time of the year in the way of fashions, but not in one respect—they are always on the side lines to pass remarks, whether they be jeering or complimentary. They are entitled to this privilege, however, since they have paid or will pay the Easter bills.

Every season has its own symbols. Little do some people realize that the dressing up in new clothes, the feeling of a new spirit at Easter time, represents the rising of Christ from the dead—the newness of life which He gave to us. The lovely flowers which bloom out each spring are a symbol also of a new beginning in plant life. The flowers die each winter but always bloom anew from the same root, with new beauty and fragrance of spring. Every person has a different emotion and experience in the Christian life, which always grows from the same root, the divine root of Christ. The egg, another symbol of the meaning of Easter, symbolizes a new life to us at Easter time.

Easter is a season of sacred rejoicing. Christ was crucified and died on the cross of Calvary. Men thought of Him as dead forever, but only three days later He arose from the deathly tomb to live! Yes, to live in the hearts of men and give each person a new life and peace through the rebirth of his soul and spirit. That is the true meaning of Easter.

If each person who purchases new clothing and other finery at Easter time would realize the significance of the tradition at this season, Christ would be glorified in a more sincere and sacred manner. We should have a deeper conception of the true meaning of Easter.

As education for life means a search for truth and beauty of character, let us consider *where* we should search for these ideals. Of course, parents who with their wisdom have understanding, investigate and continue the search by counseling their child to believe, to love, and to share. The good teacher should continue the search by directing the child's reading of good literature, which is really life. (See my article, "Reading for Profit and Pleasure," *Illinois English Bulletin*, March, 1949.) The teacher encourages the child to attend some church, to see the best movies, hear the best radio programs, see the best in television, etc. Though we can't live by maxims, they are guiding lights in our search for

summit values. The teacher can aid youth to retain these ideals by helping him to locate or formulate lists of maxims, epigrams, quotations, poems, key sentences, and central impressions, and to read books of the informative, human interest, or didactic type, which lead him to philosophize about right and wrong. Students value these lists, which form a partial basis for *what* to say in their essays. Spiritual and cultural values can be gleaned from the reading and interpretation of didactic and character poems and from biography or autobiography of great people, whose faith, courage, and service have contributed greatly to humanity; this contribution the students must learn to regard as true success and happiness, as service to humanity; this is the greatest value in "our search."

Closely associated with the gleaning of high ideals is the *selection of main ideas* from what the student has assimilated from his reading, listening, experiencing. Writing *précis* of sample paragraphs teaches the student to choose and to list ideas logically, compactly, accurately. Writing *précis* of literary essays, newspaper and magazine editorials, historical novels, biography, the better novels, and speeches, such as those in *THE WORLD'S GREAT SPEECHES*, edited by A. Craig Baird, is an excellent means for idea selection and a preparation for outlining. The child is also aided in interpreting his own ideas in the light of his reading experiences. Of course, materials read must be within the child's mental and emotional grasp.

Possessing ideas to be expressed, the student may vow, "I don't know *how* to put them on paper." As we teach *essay method*, let us proceed from sentence to paragraph, and then to essay. Knowledge of the topic sentence may first be taught by having students express the main idea of a story, an essay, or a poem in one sentence. Location of the topic sentence first, second, third, last, or its omission altogether should be taught by citing examples for student consideration. Sentence types, structure, variety, beginnings, and plan for sentence order in paragraphs should be studied. I often think it is more profitable to spend more time in making words *work* in sentences than in studying words as such out of context.

Students must understand, not only sentences but also various methods of organizing written expression, before they really go essaying. They must be led to discover these methods by a study of topic sentences, which suggest plans by which the sentence may be developed into paragraphs. Results in comprehension of methods are most satisfactory if I proceed first with development by time order or detail, in informal essays, revealing students'

personal ideas, which we term the *who*, the *when*, and the *what* of their experiences.

Preceding this assignment, I have them list the sensory experiences which have stirred within them a mood so interesting, unusual, or exciting that they recall the person, place, or incident sufficiently to draw a worthwhile conclusion. Lists of action verbs, descriptive adjectives, similes, metaphors, personifications, which they keep in their notebooks, develop in them a desire for beauty and aptness of expression. Students often read aloud examples of good descriptive passages from novels they read.

When students understand the methods of paragraph development, I give them a list of topics adaptable to the various methods. Many of these are correlated with their literature assignments. They write topic sentences for these topics. At first, topic sentences are written on the board, several students' sentences for the same topic. These are discussed pro and con, together with suitable plans for development of the paragraphs. Then, each student makes a brief outline, which I check, and the best plans are written on the blackboard and checked for what we call "the three C's"—clearness, conciseness, completeness. Now, they write their fourth "C," the conclusion. It is helpful to have some topic sentences and conclusions read aloud and have the class discover whether the student has answered satisfactorily the question he intimated in his topic sentence. He is now ready to write his essay.

Following is an example of descriptive detail from a student's essay, which reflects a mood of peace:

The lake where we camped seemed the most peaceful spot in the world. On the opposite side silvery birch and golden juniper trees added to the scene. The soft rays of the moon cast a shadowy figure through the trees, and were reflected on the water, which mirrored every detail of contour of the trees. The voice of the bullfrog told me that he too shared my feeling of contentment.

After students have done more independent and class reading, speaking, thinking, after they have studied methods of paragraph development, I ask them to plan paragraphs by giving illustration or example, reasons for their opinions, contrasts and comparisons, or cause and effect—the *what*, the *why*, and the *how* of their experiences. Definitely, students must understand how to make Kipling's "honest serving men"—the *Who?* *What?* *How?* *Why?* *Where?* *When?*—work for them in paragraphs; then, they must learn to make three to eight topic sentences, with about three sub-topics under each topic sentence; to develop all these ideas into a long essay, and tie up the main idea of the essay in a fitting con-

clusion. Historical novels and biography often contain outlines in the table of contents, which students may revise for their own convenience in preparing a workable outline for what we call a "Book Talk." This means of outlining and essaying lessens the students' fear of book reviews.

Often in biographies we search for traits of character which spelled success for a notable personage. My students found character values vital to them in the faith of Helen Keller, the courage of Eddie Rickenbacker, the honor of Lincoln and of Washington, the service of Madame Curie, and many others. They developed their essays by example, reason, cause and effect. Following are excerpts from students' essays that emanated from their reading of biographies: This student's idea emanated from William Herman's *Hearts Courageous*: "Like the men in the United Nations today, Demosthenes voiced the cry in Athens for eternal freedom and unity. . . ."

From *Deep are the Roots* by Dusseau and Gow came this comment: "Howard has the feeling for justice and equality for the Negroes. This play shows that racial prejudice could destroy our nation. . . . We must have race tolerance."

From Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, a future lawyer championed the cause of individual liberty denied Jean Valjean: "In the Constitution and the Bill of Rights Americans are guaranteed individual liberties—God-given and God-inspired, through our ancestors, who also gave us the right of trial by jury. The law that convicted Jean Valjean was man-inspired and without justice!"

Emerson said, "To thine own self be true." Let us teach youth to understand and to cultivate the best that is in himself. Then, he will appreciate and respect others. This year, to develop in students a code for self-respect and confidence, we studied Franklin's "Chart for Moral Perfection," from his *Autobiography*. We used a thirteen-week period and stressed one characteristic each week. Admissions of weaknesses in industry, order, temperance (in eating), and humility were made by the students. The other qualities of silence, resolution, frugality, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, chastity were discussed and a maxim for each was written on the board. One maxim was learned each week. They proved to be excellent topic sentences for paragraph development.

Our school uses an excellent Personality Rating Chart for evaluation of school citizenship. In class discussion my classes and I interpreted the chart. Then the students used it as a basis for writing their self-evaluation essays. They agreed that seriousness of purpose, industry, concern for others, and a sense of responsi-

bility for their own conduct and success are challenges they must accept. With this evaluation and a knowledge of Franklin's Self-Improvement Plan, some seemed to develop an attitude that was expressed by Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Nearly all students seemed to share the optimistic attitude that their problems could be solved if they improve their personality and character; what's more, I feel they are better prepared to solve them. I shall cite a few examples of self-introspection. The following wilful misinterpretation of the Golden Rule proves how one student profited from the study of self-improvement: "If you do unto others the opposite of what you want them to do to you, of what you should do, or of what the teacher wants you to do, the result will be unpopularity and, often, detention!" One student, who lacked the self-confidence necessary for essay writing, finally wrote: "When theme day comes, I'm afraid I can't write. I keep thinking, 'You Can't Take It With You'—I mean my essay—and I just don't write it." I helped him to discover and to list the reasons why he couldn't write—selecting a topic, making an outline, and so on. He was alive with ideas. The next day I read his essay, "Why I Can't Write a Theme," to the class, who received it with the question, "Who wrote that?" Needless to say he prized his "A". Another student wrote "How to Join the Zero Club." He worked hard listing the don't's of essay writing. His grade was also "A," because he proved he had profited from all the red marks I had placed on his previous essays. I had written on his fourth theme, "With your intelligence, are you still content to be a member of the Zero Club?"

Students can learn to project personality and character values from themselves to our nation. Following are quotations from an essay entitled "Becoming an American." It was written with our Personality Rating Chart as a working basis:

We might well rate America by considering its personality. . . . All the American institutions are Americanizing me. . . . To become a teacher I must learn to assume responsibility and to be concerned for my students. I must set a high moral standard, never feel inferior, and stay physically and mentally fit, so I will be well balanced emotionally. I want to become a better person so I can help guide the youth of tomorrow. . . . Better Americans will make an American with a personality and a character that will be regarded as an example for future generations to live by.

Discovery of character values in short stories, and their interpretation in class in the light of student experiences and previous reading, proves valuable. The questions: Who's right? Who's wrong? Why? are always in the students' minds. Note this student's interpretation of John Steinbeck's story, "Flight": "Pepe was childish. He had not learned to get along with people, to assume responsibility. Because he was afraid of the law, he ran away—and lost his life. We can't run away from troubles."

In my opinion there is far too much reading of crime and murder stories. Youth especially should read more stories and novels that build ideas for peace and love of humankind. In some original themes I have noted some students' desire to excuse a murderer; even worse, some thoroughly understand and seem to approve such premeditated murders as those in Poe and Doyle stories. Perhaps this is only the bravado attitude of these students; nevertheless, it alarms me! But should I wonder? Murder is committed, voiced, printed, pictured; love is cheapened by movies, funnies, and some magazines. With Job I affirm, "Man knoweth not the price thereof"—of wealth gleaned from all these forms of entertainment, which distort our youth's conception of true love.

At this point in our writing, I taught Wilbur Daniel Steele's story, "Footfalls." Note the Biblical quotation used by this student as a basis for his argument against revenge:

Ignorant, pitiful Boaz Negro, the blind shoe cobbler, became an anarchist to the law; he lived only for revenge. His daily silent pent-up hatred almost destroyed his joy in living. Until his son was proven innocent, Boaz loved nothing or no one. In a way, I think he may be excused for murdering the murderer of his son. . . . But if he had been patient, the law would have revenged the wrong. The Lord said, "Vengeance is mine!"

A conception of the worth and the growth of the human soul developed best with our reading of Holmes' "The Chambered Nautilus", Irving's "The Devil and Tom Walker," and Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster." The ideal that we must build "more stately mansions" in our speeded-up world was discussed. The idea that soul danger is more to be feared than physical danger, even on the battlefield, was stressed. A comparison and contrast of how two men in the above-mentioned stories met the temptations of evil is quoted here:

The Devil, evil, tempts everyone as he did Tom Walker and Jabez Stone. As they did, we often bargain our souls and our peace of mind for money. . . . Some people don't care how they get money. They prosper for a while. . . . Tom represents the hypocritical church-goer;

he taunted the Devil to take him if he had made a farthing, and the Devil obeyed! . . . Jabez loved peace of mind more than money. With the pleadings of Daniel Webster, and Jabez's own repentance, he was rescued from the Devil.

Causes and results of stupidity of the man in Jack London's story "To Build a Fire" were personalized in this essay:

This man's stupidity is evident, because, like many of us, he refused to listen to others. He had no imagination to realize the significance of the cold temperature; like many young people, he wouldn't think or plan ahead. He was unkind to his dog, who could and would have saved his master's life by going for help, if he had loved instead of feared the man.

This assignment proved to students that character and true intellect walk hand in hand, and are necessary to preserve physical well-being.

An example of amateur criticism and fair interpretation of the requirements for personal happiness emanated from our reading and discussion of three character poems. By reason, comparison, and contrast, the following essay discusses three unhappy men, whose names are titles of three poems we read:

Miniver Cheevy was unhappy because he lived entirely in the past and he had no friends. Much of the time teen-agers live and work with other people; they learn about the past, but they live in the present. . . . Unlike Miniver, we usually try to break our bad habits, but some of us call our troubles "fate"; some of us drink and get into trouble, such as by speeding the family automobile. There's no point in being cynical like Miniver about our age. Let's help to improve our society. The atomic bomb proves that we don't have time to complain. We must build "A World of Fellowship" if civilization is to endure.

Richard Corey "went home—and put a bullet through his head" because he didn't appreciate his life; he had no hope for the future. I appreciate my education and money I earn because I work for both.

Bewick Finzer lost all interest in life when he lost his wealth. These three men could have been happier if they had tried to be better men. If they had respected themselves and others and if they'd had a goal for the future, these men would have been more nearly content; instead they were self-centered, proud, and discontented with life.

A conception of true humility was grasped by this boy after our reading of Carl Sandburg's "Prayers of Steel." He says: ". . . I hope someday I can be really useful to mankind. Like Sandburg, I want God to take my life and beat out the bad, so that I can serve humanity, even in the humblest way."

In our teaching of written composition sometimes we teachers are tempted to take the course of least preparation. We may simply list outmoded titles for student themes instead of aiding

the pupil to express his own ideas and hidden emotions. We're often like the old lady whose guests at 11:45 A.M. tactfully expressed concern about lunch, to which she replied, "It won't take long to open up canned goods."

An appreciation of our struggle for Freedom should concern everyone, especially youth who are called upon to defend her. A picture of the Statue of Liberty, with the quotation: "If you believe in me, come in and be one of us," led to discussion of the statue itself, and to the nature, development, growth, and use of our freedoms. We worked out a Freedom Theme for related theme topics, representing major events of American history as "The Torch of Liberty," being carried by the four high school classes. Freshmen were the early American colonists, "Grasping the Torch." Sophomores were the Revolutionary heroes, "Holding High the Torch" for all the world to see; Juniors, Civil War Heroes, "Illuminating the Torch" by its enlightening promise of civil rights, racial tolerance, and unity; Seniors, heroes of both World Wars, "Keeping the Torch Burning," in spite of Communistic winds of hate and lust for power, so that all the world will see freedom symbolizes the light of love for all mankind. One student wrote:

We must accept the challenge to keep the Torch of Liberty and Knowledge ever burning, to show all people of the world that America is a Land of Freedom, where our minds, our bodies and our souls hold high the torch, which gives us light to live by and to go forward as we choose.

If we consider seriously the major cause of juvenile delinquency, both of thought and deed, do we not agree that freedom rampant and misguided among teen-agers is the reason? The questions: How much freedom should you have at home? in boy-girl relationships? at school? All these queries, some students like to argue about in their essays. I tried to teach students to understand and to broaden their sense of responsibility regarding the "Four Freedoms." Fear of the future is certainly a major cause of restlessness in youth. On the bulletin board I placed four pictures, representing the Four Freedoms. In class discussion the students' fears were discussed and classified. Some fears were: not getting a job, ill health, not passing school subjects, Communism, getting into trouble, the atom bomb, war, and death. One boy inquired, "What chance do we have except to go to the war and be killed?" A more optimistic boy voiced his opinion by explanation of the values of a good education:

A good education helps to destroy our fears. It lessens our fear of poverty, because it prepares us for a job or a profession at which we can earn our living. . . . Fear of the future is diminished if we keep busy preparing our daily lessons and sharing in social activities. . . . If we learn to get along with people, we are helping to outlaw war. . . . By forming health habits and learning ways to preserve our health, we lessen our fear of ill health. . . . The more faith and hope and the less fear and hatred we have in our world, the more peace we shall enjoy.

"Freedom from Want," represented by a typical American family at dinner on Thanksgiving, plus a student's report on "The Story of Thanksgiving, usually inspire detailed informal essays, listing the things students want—and why they want them. Note this development by reason:

I believe it is necessary for all people to enjoy Freedom from Want, protection of their lives and property. I believe we should give needy people food, clothing, shelter, but giving these necessities to people will not insure peace. . . . We must help these people to help themselves to earn these things. I don't want people to give me things; I want to learn a trade so I can feel important and rely on myself. . . . I want to take part in my community, my church, and my government. I want to be somebody.

"Freedom of Expression" is of major concern in the English curriculum. We must propagate this freedom in our students, or we fail as teachers of composition. Would that all people could share one girl's appreciation of the freedom to develop her mind. She regards this freedom as a privilege and a responsibility, because she "must learn to *think* right so she will *do* right," and I add, so she will *say* right.

We must help students to interpret ideas, like freedom, democracy, and the American Way. One year we worked out a theme entitled "Our Miniature World." We divided the topic into various phases of our school life: A World of Fellowship, A World of Affairs, A World of Art and Knowledge, and A World of Religion. I valued some of the students' essays sufficiently to include them in the school yearbook, which I sponsored.

Often adolescents fail to realize that school subjects are means to help them identify themselves with the world outside the classroom. Following is an excerpt from an essay of the short key-work type, which catalogs events of a busy school day:

Throughout the day Frankfort High hums with activity that parallels happenings outside these walls. There are many things to do—to see—to hear—to learn; science, math, literature, history, physical education develop us mentally and physically, mould our personalities, build wholesome characters, in preparation for our future citizenship in an adult World of Affairs.

Of course, students immediately identified themselves with their favorite phase of "Our Miniature World." A young musician defended her World of Art in an essay "In Defense of Music":

"Without a song" to stir my emotions—joy, sadness, faith, hope, love, appreciation, patriotism, "the world would all go wrong." . . . I especially enjoy semiclassical love songs. The Christmas carols inspire my faith in religion. . . .

I thrill as I play in tune with other instruments in the band. Playing a selection that expresses the particular mood I'm in thrills me more than drama or good books. People may be ignorant of the theory of music, but almost all human beings can enjoy, appreciate, and understand an expression of joy, sadness, love, or patriotism in music.

Another student thinks, "Music makes us better than we are," and that "In this Power Age it is an ideal way to spend our leisure time."

Many worthwhile essays were written in defense of the fundamental subjects, but I was disappointed that they left me to essay the defense of English! One boy wrote an answer to another student's question: "What good will algebra and geometry ever do us?" His answer was:

Mathematics prepares us to cope with many problems in business and in daily life. It gives us a basis for engineering, aeronautics, physics, chemistry. We learn to think in math. In our "World of Knowledge" we must think and reason, if we are to get and to keep peace; for instance, we must use the atomic bomb reasonably and sensibly to help mankind instead of to destroy him.

The idea that there is dignity and honor in a task well done if it contributes to the general welfare should be instilled in the thinking of our students. The expressed desire to search for an easy job for "ready cash," and the tendency of some students to regard rural children and farming as inferior to city students and city occupations are some false values we must destroy. One student of agriculture took opposition to the views expressed above; here is a portion of his polite argument, developed by reason, comparison, cause and effect:

Formerly, people thought an uneducated man could become a good farmer. Times and opinions have changed. Due to the depleting of the soil, fewer number of farms, more factories and the increase of population in cities, the farmer must produce more food—and at a greater profit. Therefore, he must know more about farming—soil conservation, cultivation, farm conveniences. . . . The farmer feeds and rules the world.

Possibly if we were permitted to teach religion in the classroom, we should soon be attempting to indoctrinate our students with our own opinions; such teaching might destroy Freedom of Religion. However, I believe some critics have gone to the extreme by insisting that moral tags lessen the value of literary selections. I enjoy immensely the aptness with which oldsters quote maxims from McGuffey's Reader; these moral lessons parallel almost every experience in life. To nearly all teen-agers, in their formative years, an ideal in a literary selection is a more enduring value than the method of expression. I believe children, as well as adults, are bored with education for *sole* pleasure at the expense of *soul* pleasure. Youth develops quickly; they want to know they are right. One girl expressed her sense of moral responsibility in this quotation from her explanatory informal essay:

Morally, I have a responsibility to become stronger and better. . . . From my church training and from good literature I learn to respect the nobler things of life, such as birth, love, character, death, God, immortality.

A speech was written by a student who was inspired by a picture and by class discussion of a devoted mother praying for her soldier son. Note the development of this essay by illustration of and reason for the student's appreciation of Freedom of Religion—of faith and prayer:

Wars have been fought and martyrs have died in order that we may have Freedom of Religion. We upperclassmen comprehend a deep meaning in religion, for we know we are about to take our place in a world where all is not well—where there is bitter hatred, dishonesty, love of wealth and power. . . . Our religious hope will help us to build a better world. We will believe in, work for, and pray for the better things in life, such as service to the needy, truthfulness in all we do and say, and loyalty to our home, our church, our community, and our nation in our search for a truly Peaceful Way of Life.

After my classes have written several essays, I frequently write on the blackboard challenging questions such as these: What is meant by things that endure? How can you help to promote and insure security, peace, happiness? I allow them two or three weeks to think, inquire, or read about these questions, if they wish. Only the best readers and thinkers respond usually to concrete interpretations of such questions; slower students choose easier topics. One student suggested Faith as an enduring quality of character. From that idea, in class discussion, we worked out four character traits from the first letter in each word of the name of our school, Frankfort Community High School—Faith, Courage, Honor,

Service. Outside reading and essaying to illustrate, define, and give reasons for these traits were assigned to the class. Following is a portion of an essay developed by definition, reason, example:

Today there is great need for *Faith*, especially in young people, for we will determine the future of the world. . . . If we have faith in God, in democracy, in others, and in ourselves, . . . Faith to work and pray for what is right, for everlasting peace and security, peace will endure. . . . If we worship the past, as the Chinese did for centuries, we shall not progress. . . . We must have faith that truth will win. . . . Faith is a "beacon of heartening hope," "a pillar of strength, which sustains us."

One day I asked my best class, "What is the greatest problem that confronts the present generation?" Later, a brilliant young man contrasted democracy and Communism as "two armies—one army with the slogan, 'What is yours is mine, if I can get it—if you are a weaker person or nation'. . . . Communism would destroy man's freedom and warp his Faith." He continued his contrast:

The army for democracy and right is based on *Faith* in God—"the evidence of things hoped for." This army is noted for its courage in the face of adversity, which an enduring faith in God and the nation it loves makes possible. Inspired by the motto, 'What is mine is yours if you need it,' this army is striving to raise the standards of the world. It upholds faith, love, courage, honor, happiness, service, thereby making the world a brighter, happier place, where all nations could live in harmony. . . . Our democratic army upholds religious freedom and recognizes the worth of the individual. . . . We honor those who fight on the battlefield, in our government, and in everyday life to preserve democracy and its ideals, but as students, we must ask ourselves the question—Are we educating ourselves by studying the Bible, government, history, current events, to understand our problems so we can solve them in the future?

It is much easier to help the students to define *Courage*. Stories, poems, and a great deal of their reading define this quality admirably. One student compared courage in school work to a race:

It takes *Courage* to run the race of life these days. We acquire courage if we remain in high school four years and do our best. There are many handicaps in our race for education: laziness, unemployment, 'The War Years,' fear of not passing our subjects. These slow our pace. . . . We learn how Lincoln, Carver, Keller, Curie won their races, because courage enabled them to overcome all handicaps. . . . Perhaps a war plant job is financially tempting; we may often want to quit school for the armed services—if we are failing! Let's finish high school. We can serve our country and ourselves better by staying in school. . . . Let's work harder. Being able to start over when you're down and out—that's *Courage*.

Almost all my students have a fair conception of sportsmanship and honor, which they learn in daily athletic and social events, and in class. It is more important for teachers to emphasize how to take what the world *gives* than it is to stress the actual possession. The foundation of character is "worth, honor." Too often students work only for grades on a theme; therefore, they copy the work of their classmates instead of working for ideas of their own. One student develops his essay by dictionary definition of *Honor*; then, by example, he shows whom he should honor and how:

Honor is "esteem due or paid to worth, manifestations of respect or reverence." I honor God, who gave me a mind to grasp knowledge. I must obey the Ten Commandments. I try to obey the wishes of my parents and my teachers, who teach me the best. I place democracy above all governments, because it guarantees me freedom, I must use these freedoms in an honorable way.

Class discussion of school rules and the school Handbook and of The American Code helped to define *Service* as the true test of character. I offered a challenge: "What will you offer the world when you finish your education?" The following is one student's answer:

I offer the service which my education makes me able to give: "the performance of labor for the benefit of another—duty done or required." Because we are educated, we are not content to be slaves in service to anyone or anything; we desire to serve because we know what, whom, and how to serve.

Inspired by an appreciation of Emerson's poem, "Voluntaries III," this student places *Service* to principle and country above self:

When a country goes to war to defend its own freedom and that of its neighbor nations, young boys must suddenly become men; they must suddenly stop their carefree way of life with their loved ones and become soldiers! Because their future is uncertain, they cannot make definite plans of their own. Some decide to live while they can. Recklessly? Yes. For this reason, many say the younger generation is impolite, immoral, immodest . . . I appreciate Emerson's poem, because he upholds youth's courage and confidence in these words:

When duty whispers low "Thou must,"
The Youth replies, "I can."

With all my sympathy for youth, facing the call to war, I attempted to point out that self-pity, recklessness, or immorality is undesirable and that faith, courage, knowledge of the past and present, and a sense of humor, as revealed in many recent World War stories, are winning and enduring characteristics in the face of any danger, even war.

Among informal essays that won honors that year, this one, using explanation, illustration, and example, and entitled "The Future That My Country and Community Offers Me," is most optimistic:

Many young people are taking a very dark outlook on life. We hear them ask, "Is there any hope for the future?" All that young men have to look forward to is being shot down on some battlefield. The young ladies await heartbreak and loneliness. As a result of this attitude, youth are quitting school instead of trying to build themselves for the future. Some who remain in school take a pessimistic attitude toward school and life and do not do their best.

If we could view our future optimistically, we should understand it is the most promising any generation of youth could anticipate. . . . "What about Korea, China, Iran?" you ask. As an optimist, I answer, "Look back at history—hasn't some perplexing problem always existed?"

We should not look forward to destruction but to construction. It is because of the things our country and community offer us that we are able to build or construct our lives and our community. Our government offers us the Four Freedoms . . . and the inherent, hard-earned privileges, which we take for granted, while people of other countries value them very highly. . . . Our concern for the future of our community challenges us to plan for this future in our school life. . . . Citizenship, the Golden Rule, manners, the fundamental subjects, all help us to plan. . . . Our homes are our community. . . . Here we learn to love and to share responsibility. . . .

But the main foundation of our faith and morals for the future is laid in our church. . . . Faith makes it possible for us to tackle our task, even if it means going off to war to defend the principles in which we believe!

If young Americans grasp the problems of the future, if we take advantage of the opportunities for educational, social, physical, and recreational training, offered by our country and community, if we truly BUILD, we shall have a prosperous, constructive future, instead of a destructive one.

Another title which inspires patriotism is "Our American Heritage," which one student acknowledges was "bought by human sacrifice of our ancestors." Another affirms:

As I study world and American history, I realize I am wealthy, because I possess the heritage of becoming an American Citizen. . . . I must help preserve our heritage of freedom . . . by contributing to a national defense program, by helping to conserve natural resources, by improving my morals and those in my community, by observing rules of citizenship, honor, justice, and the Golden Rule. . . . Our American Heritage is worth working for, fighting for, and even dying for!

One student wrote, "I'm my own boss. These simple words are only a brief definition for my most precious heritage—individual freedom."

Another poetical lover of music interpreted the song "America" in the light of his individual freedom:

"'Of thee I sing' . . . 'land of the noble free,' where our ancestors won for us 'Our Heritage'." Then he voiced appreciation of our cultural inheritance of music, art, literature from other countries. His tolerance is expressed in these words: "Let all that breathe partake"—of Our American Way of Life." His conclusion was: "May I always sing and pray that our land will 'be bright with Freedom's holy light' and that we will be protected by our great God, the only King to whom we bow!" Don't you agree that these essays are an expression of the attitude of service above self?

Humbly I submit the theory that the seriousness of teacher and pupil in their constant search for high ideals of truth and beauty, gleaned by reading, speaking, listening, living, and the reflection and interpretation of these values in the light of the experience of the pupil are the major means for "A Search for Summit Values" that endure. As the pupil gains a knowledge of these values and of the methods of developing them in his own writing, he can reveal, with courage and confidence, his inner self and soul; this is true education for summit values of character.

In the highest sense the classroom is "The Battlefield" for life abundant and enduring, where the teacher maneuvers a strategic cold war of ideas against all the forces which contribute toward a sense of false values and juvenile delinquency in her students. Hers is a struggle to enlist her students on the side of truth, faith, courage, honor, service, love, friendship, happiness.

It is the duty of every teacher of composition to lead every student, however meager the pupil's attempts, to essay the ideal of *Beauty* shared by the old Quaker woman, who enumerated the cosmetics responsible for her lovely complexion: ". . . for my lips, *truth*; for my voice, *prayer*; for my eyes, *pity*; for my hands, *charity*; for my figure, *uprightness*; for my heart, *love*."

The English Language Arts

A Review

The year's most important book for the professional bookshelf of the English teacher is unquestionably *The English Language Arts*, first of the long-awaited series of volumes prepared by the Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English. Dora V. Smith and the members of the Commission have performed an exceptional service for teachers of English and, indirectly, for pupils.

This volume is intended to give an overview of the present status of the English curriculum from kindergarten through graduate school, to define and make suggestions for solving the major problems in the teaching of English, and to serve as a guide for those responsible for planning the curriculum in English in each of the thousands of schools in the United States. It will be followed by four other volumes, each considerably more specialized. Their titles are: *The Language Arts in the Elementary School*, *The English Language Arts in the Secondary School*, *The College Teaching of English*, and *The Preparation of Teachers of the English Language Arts*.

Not everyone will agree with everything that *The English Language Arts* suggests. Some will object even to the title, saying either that it is redundant or that it sells "English" down the river in favor of these newfangled "language arts." Many, including this reviewer, will find sentences, paragraphs, or even whole chapters with which they are in basic disagreement. Many, for instance, may rise to object vigorously to the idea that every child should be promoted to the next grade level every year. Many will object to the lukewarm attitude toward the core curriculum. Some will complain that the book is too liberal or too advanced, others that it is reactionary.

But despite the disagreements that the book will inevitably arouse, it offers practicable suggestions for a sensible, methodical, unified program aimed at these goals: "To think clearly and honestly, to read thoughtfully, to communicate effectively, and to listen intelligently." It tends slightly, but very slightly, to the educational left, yet it does not ignore that content which decades or centuries of experience have shown is essential to the development of well-rounded men and women. It excoriates old errors and suggests ways of avoiding them in future, but it usually does not

throw out the old unless it is demonstrably erroneous. It avoids the extreme of the conservatives who would limit the curriculum to a study of formal grammar and the "classics," and the extreme of a few persons who sometimes seem determined to make of the public schools a learn-nothing haven for the lazy and the stupid, an unprofitable place for an intelligent human being to spend a fifth or a fourth of his lifetime.

The English Language Arts is divided into four parts. Part I, "Making the Curriculum," discusses the purpose of teaching the language arts, the changing interests and abilities and needs of young people of school age, "goals and experiences in the language arts program," and ways of building a curriculum. The following statement indicates the emphasis of these chapters: "The teaching of the language arts attempts to develop in students the ability to think and to communicate in the English language and to understand the humanizing values of literature. Its goals are, in a word, the linguistic abilities and the awareness of the values of life which are required by the fully mature civilized human being."

Part II, "Suggested Programs," becomes somewhat more specific. It consists of three chapters—one on the preprimary through intermediate grades, one on the junior and senior high school, and the third on colleges and graduate schools. The emphasis in each chapter is placed upon the need for continuity from one year to the next and especially upon continuity in the growth of the individual student.

Perhaps most meaty, and almost certainly most helpful to the teacher in the classroom, is Part III, "Problems Faced by Curriculum-Makers." Don't let the term "curriculum-makers" make you think that this section isn't for you, even though you have always thought of yourself as a teacher and have left the curriculum making to others. Willy-nilly, you are a curriculum-maker every time you give an assignment or teach a class. These chapters are for you, and they may please you or excite you or anger you, but they certainly will not leave you feeling smug.

After a chapter on planning and minimum essentials, the second chapter in Part III considers the vital question of the relationship of the English curriculum to the total school program. As you probably know, we English teachers are rather often sniped at. If we haven't anything to offer, if we've been completely mistaken in what we've been trying to do all these years, we ought to hope that the snipers are successful. But this chapter points out that English has a vital contribution to make to the whole educational program, and iterates and reiterates that only an English

teacher well trained in *English* can accomplish what must be accomplished. The problem of the core curriculum is met almost head-on, and the core comes out second best. The Commission points out both its advantages and its disadvantages, but warns that language skills are likely to be neglected, and includes this revealing sentence; "Only one school has reported to the Commission that students in integrated courses do any adequate amount of personal writing."

Next in Part III are chapters on the library and on individual differences. The following chapter, "The Modern View of Grammar and Linguistics," is the one that most teachers are likely to consult most eagerly. If you are familiar with the writings of Robert Pooley, you can guess at the tone of this chapter, although it tends to be a bit more conservative than Mr. Pooley usually is. Two sentences from the chapter should be pasted in a conspicuous place on every English teacher's desk: "The teaching of correctness in school and college courses must shift in emphasis from the laying down of negative rules to the development of positive insights." "Grammar learned by memory is practically useless; grammar learned by reason in the creative act of constructing better sentences becomes an intellectual tool in the hands of a sufficiently mature student."

Chapters on speech and writing, on listening, and on mass modes of communication come next. A long list of questions to be used in the study of movies, radio, television, newspapers, and magazines can be put to almost immediate use in your classroom. The chapter called "The Program in Literature" seems less thorough and on the whole less satisfying than most of the other chapters in the book; perhaps the later volumes will adequately expand its general precepts, such as these two, selected from nine: "Both belles lettres and wholesome books less literary in quality make a valuable contribution to the program in English as they do to life outside of school." "There is no necessary dichotomy between old and new literature. Both should be used to interpret the current scene and to give perspective to it."

In a chapter on reading and semantics, this reviewer was happy to see considerable praise for the nearly lost art of reading aloud. The semanticist is likely to feel that his pet subject deserves more than seven pages, but the semanticist first needs to translate some of his more abstruse ideas into terms whose implications can be understood by less exalted personages.

With Part IV, "Evaluating the Outcomes of Instruction," the book ends. No, not quite. A bibliography of forty-nine pages is

there, listing a lifetime's worth of reading on the subject that nobody knows enough about: how to help Jimmie and Betty learn that words are more than words.

The publisher of this "must" volume is Appleton-Century-Crofts. Members of the National Council may order directly from the Council offices, and thus secure the book for about forty per cent less money.

J. N. Hook

LITERARY MAP

If you were a member of the Association last year, you no doubt have received your map of Illinois authors. The map committee hopes that you like it, and wishes to thank those of you who suggested names of authors to be included. If you have not received the map, please notify C. W. Roberts, 204-A Lincoln Hall, Urbana, Illinois.

Sufficient extra copies of the new map have been printed that one may be given free to each new member of the Association. If any English teachers in your school are not members, why not suggest that they take advantage of this opportunity? By doing so, you can strengthen your Association and simultaneously do a favor for your fellow teachers and their students.

Maps and the two supplementary *Bulletins*, containing brief biographical information concerning nearly 300 Illinois authors, are also available to anyone else who wants them. The cost is as follows: (1) Map only: \$1.50; (2) the two supplementary *Bulletins*: two for \$0.50; (3) map and the two *Bulletins*: \$1.75; (4) *Bulletins* bound in cloth cover, with map on thin paper in pocket: \$2.50.

If you have not yet renewed your membership, you may use the form on the back cover of this issue. You'll not want to miss the *Bulletin* this year, particularly the spring issues, which will be devoted to the grading of compositions. Several dozen teachers from all parts of the state are cooperating in the preparation of those issues.

FALL MEETING—OCTOBER 3 AND 4

The fall meeting of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English, co-sponsored by the Department of English and the College of Education of the University, will be held on October 3 and 4 in Urbana. Attendance at these meetings has varied from two hundred to four hundred during the past few years. In some less populous states, six hundred or more English teachers attend similar meetings. Let's prove that Illinois teachers are no less mindful of their professional responsibilities than are teachers elsewhere. Wilmer Lamar of Decatur High School, chairman, and the other members of the program committee have planned a stimulating, informative program.

Registration begins at 2:30 Friday afternoon. At three o'clock, ten discussion groups will be meeting simultaneously in University classrooms. The topics for discussion are those which most members last spring indicated they would like to have considered: grammar, creative writing, teaching of literature, speech, articulation, the core curriculum, and others. Discussion leaders, consultants, and recorders have been appointed for each group.

Featured speaker at the dinner Friday evening will be W. Wilbur Hatfield, whose influence upon the teaching of English in this country has perhaps been greater than that of anyone else. As the long-time editor of the *English Journal* and *College English*, and as executive secretary of the National Council of Teachers of English, Mr. Hatfield has become better informed concerning our profession than any other person could possibly be. It is certain that his talk will be helpful, informative, and far-seeing. Our Association is fortunate that Mr. Hatfield will address us.

On Saturday morning the discussion sessions will continue. At the luncheon which will conclude the meeting, J. N. Hook will talk on the subject "Some Notes on Illinois Authors."

Meet your English-teacher friends in Urbana on October 3 and 4!

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